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Pete Winton
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Law school giving higher grades to students

New system gives graduates a boost

By Pete Winton

Indiana Daily Student

12/10/90

IU law students can expect to receive higher grades this semester because of a new grading policy designed to make graduates more marketable, law school officials said.

The policy was initiated after law school students and faculty raised concerns that IU's grading policy

was harsher than at other Midwestern law schools. The new system, which went into effect last summer, will raise the grade for average work from a 2.75 to a 3.0.

Many students said last week they were made aware of the new policy only recently and believe it is a change for the better.

For the last several years law students have complained they are at a hiring disadvantage because other law schools used higher grading scales, said Terry Bethel, professor of law and acting dean of the law school.

would be more competitive in the marketplace."

Lucas said when he was interviewing for jobs he had to explain to employers several times he was in the top third of his class, because his GPA appeared low when compared to graduates of other schools.

Some students said the new policy should help them get interviews.

"When you interview for jobs, if you don't have a 3.0 or close to it, (employers) won't even look at you," said third-year student Sharon Buechler. "It's going to enable us to get jobs where we couldn't before."

Bethel said the policy is not a "written, mandatory rule," but a guideline for professors so that stu-

"You don't like to sit down (in an interview) and start making excuses about what your grades are," he said. "Our students will now be on the same playing field as other law school graduates."

But some law professors have called the new policy "profoundly irresponsible" and said it "cheapens the standards" by which employers evaluate students.

"This move, like others debauching standards, reflects the leveling frenzy that grips the current faculty and administration," said Robert Heidt, professor of law.

dents taking the same classes under different professors can expect similar grades for the same quality of work.

And Heidt said he believes most professors, even those opposed to the policy, will abide by it.

"It's understood we're all expected to follow it," Heidt said.

While the new system should help students when they look for jobs, it will not affect where they rank in their class.

"I don't know why professors would be worried about the new policy; it's not going to change the class distribution," said third-year student Bruce Beddow. "We're not competing against each other at IU as much as we are with other law schools."

"I think our students benefited from our school's long reputation of not inflating grades," Heidt said.

Bethel said a survey of Midwestern law schools performed by IU's law school a few years ago found IU's grading policy was one of the strictest in the region.

The survey found that a 2.8 grade point average at IU often is equivalent to between a 3.0 and a 3.4 at the other law schools surveyed, Bethel said.

The GPA required to remain in school will increase from 2.0 to 2.3

to compensate for the higher averages, he said, although current second- and third-year students will fall under the former policy because they received grades under both systems.

"We're not doing this to carry people through who normally wouldn't make it," Bethel said. "We haven't made the actual program less rigorous or made it easier to graduate."

Heidt said once it becomes widely known that the school is inflating

See LAW,

Back page, this section

Law

From Page 1

grades, employers will begin evaluating students according to less objective criteria, such as their appearances and who they know.

"Our placement office has been very successful in part because the integrity of the grading system has been maintained over decades," he said.

But several students and graduates said they do not believe employers have any idea how the law school grades.

"Employers in New York and Chicago wouldn't know," said Eric Lucas, a 1989 law school graduate. "I think it's a good idea. You